



Discussion Guide

to accompany the "Think Again" video

Maine Office of Substance Abuse
Department of Behavioral and Developmental Services

Introduction:

The “Think Again” campaign, a series of 4 television ads featuring Maine youth, began running on television stations in Maine in January, 2002. A new 6-minute video produced by the same firm that created the ads incorporates additional footage with the ads to delve into some of the issues around underage drinking in more depth.

The conceptual model represented by the theme “Think Most Kids Drink? Think Again!” is grounded in research that demonstrates the importance of perceived social norms in young people’s decisions about alcohol use. For a variety of reasons, including a barrage of media messages that glamorize alcohol use, young people often overperceive these norms. Their mistaken belief that “everybody else is drinking” leads to a subtle pressure to conform to a norm that doesn’t exist in reality. The fact is that most middle and high school students in Maine are not using alcohol.

How to get a copy of the Think Again video:

Any agency or organization in Maine may borrow a copy for short-term loan from the Office of Substance Abuse Information and Resource Center (1-800-499-0027). More information is available on the web at www.maineosa.org/irc.

Acknowledgements:

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The opinions expressed in the video and in this publication are those of the interviewees and the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Office of Substance Abuse and Department of Behavioral and Developmental Services.

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If You Think Most Kids Drink, Think Again!

*A public awareness media campaign sponsored by the Maine Department of Behavioral And Developmental Services,
Office of Substance Abuse, and Council on Children and Families
January 2002*

Background

- ? The conceptual model represented by the theme “Think Most Kids Drink? Think Again!” is grounded in research that demonstrates the importance of perceived social norms in young people’s decisions about alcohol use.¹ For a variety of reasons, including a barrage of media messages that glamorize alcohol use, young people often overperceive these norms.
- ? The research shows that 6th graders, when asked what proportion of kids their age drink, on average answer about half – which is far above the actual rates. In Maine, survey results show that about 2/3 of middle school students have never had more than a few sips of alcohol and only 14% used alcohol in the 30 days prior to the survey (Maine Youth Drug and Alcohol Use Survey, 2002).
- ? Further, the research goes on to show that students who overestimate the proportion of drinkers are more likely to drink than those who correctly estimate their peers’ behavior. Clearly, students’ decisions about alcohol use are often shaped by their beliefs about what is “normal” – and too often their perceptions about what everybody else is doing are wrong.
- ? This approach recognizes that peer pressure is more subtle than a friend offering a beer. The campaign addresses one facet of the complex social pressures teenagers face – the pressure to conform to what they mistakenly believe everybody else is doing. While these subtle social pressures influence people of all ages, they are particularly critical for middle school students, who are just beginning to face decisions about experimenting with alcohol. This campaign is not a magic bullet – it is one piece in a multi-pronged and comprehensive approach to the problem.

The Contest

The Office of Substance Abuse and the Council on Children and Families sponsored a contest in December 2001 to reinforce the theme of the new media campaign. The contest was open to any group of middle school aged youth in Maine. Each participating group submitted a list of all the reasons they could think of why kids their age don’t drink. For a list of some of the most interesting and most common reasons submitted in the contest, please call the Office of Substance Abuse Information and Resource Center at 1-800-499-0027. Two grand prizes were awarded:

- ✍ Overall winner: Bristol Consolidated School, 6th grade – listed 142 reasons
- ✍ Per Capita winner: Islesboro Central School, 6th grade – 6 youth listed 90 reasons

The Public Service Announcements

- ? The four 30-second television public service announcements were designed to reach a target audience of kids starting at age 12.
- ? Several Maine teenagers featured prominently in the television advertisements help dispel the myth that most kids drink. They are joined by other Maine youth who cite a variety of reasons they personally choose not to drink.

¹ Hansen, W.B., 1993. School-based alcohol prevention programs. *Alcohol Health and Research World* 17 (1): 54-60.

Planning for a good discussion:²

Carefully selected video segments can be an effective way to open up a discussion on a sensitive subject. The Think Again video portrays the multi-faceted issues related to underage drinking and alcohol use in Maine communities, and reflects the many levels of complex choices that young people face about alcohol use. The video can be used to encourage participants to discuss whether these issues and concerns apply in their own communities, and to explore potential solutions and action steps. **Because alcohol issues can be very personal and emotionally charged, it is important to consider the potential impact on participants both during and after the discussion, and to be prepared with a support and/or referral plan should one or more participants express a need for help or intervention.**

When organizing such a discussion, be aware that participants will vary greatly in their desire to discuss controversial or difficult issues honestly. Each person must have the freedom to participate at his or her own level of comfort. Emotions about alcohol issues may run the gamut from apathy to empathy to fear, anger, and grief. While it is critical to recognize the validity of all emotional reactions and insights, a classroom discussion is not, and should not be, a group counseling session or support group. It is possible to have a great discussion on alcohol issues without incorporating participants' personal experiences, but it takes thoughtful planning and facilitation. In most group discussions involving youth, especially in classroom settings, personal disclosure about alcohol use should be avoided. Some suggestions for a productive discussion include:

- ✍ Discourage personal disclosure explicitly when framing the discussion, pointing out that the purpose of the discussion is not to have participants share their individual experiences but to examine objectively the larger issues around how young people can make decisions about alcohol use.
- ✍ Prepare specific and targeted questions that keep the discussion focused on the larger social questions, rather than on participants' personal experiences.
- ✍ Incorporate additional written materials (i.e. newspaper articles, survey results, legislation, research studies, magazine advertisements, etc) from which examples and details can be drawn to enhance the discussion.

One more word of caution: many people, youth included, tend to overestimate the frequency and amount that the “typical” teenager drinks. In spite of common misperceptions that “everybody does it,” the 2002 Maine Drug and Alcohol Use Survey revealed that in fact most students are not regularly using alcohol. Among the more than 50,000 students in grades 6-12 who participated in the survey, 45% had never used alcohol at all (more than a few sips) in their lifetimes. More than two-thirds had not used any alcohol within the past month; even among high school students, the majority had not used any alcohol at all in the month before the survey. **It is crucial in any discussion on underage drinking issues, that we are careful not to contribute, even unintentionally, to the myth that everybody drinks. It is particularly important to help youth who have made healthy choices and who are not using alcohol see that they are “the norm”, and that the majority of their peers are making the same healthy choices, even though they might often get a different impression from the media and other sources.**

² Also see the last page of this guide for a brief overview of roundtables/study circles, which are one particular type of discussion that many schools and communities in Maine have used for effective discussions on a variety of topics.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. What are the different reasons that the youth in the video provide for their choices not to drink?
2. What messages do youth typically get about alcohol from television shows and ads, and from movies and magazines? Are these messages accurate? How is this video different from the typical television ad?
3. If you drank alcohol, what do you think are the chances that something bad would happen to you?
4. Some people insist that they would never drink and drive, but then end up doing so at some point. Why do you think they change their mind?
5. The youth in this video seem to have made some pretty clear choices about drinking. What do you think their friends think about their choices?
6. One young man expresses concern over how his action impact his little sister. Do older siblings have an influence on younger siblings' choices? Do they have a responsibility to be a positive role model?
7. Why do you think adults warn young people not to drink alcohol? And why do you think young people sometimes ignore these warnings?
8. If you had the opportunity to create a public service announcement with the goal of reducing underage drinking:
 - a. what target audience would you want to reach?
 - b. what message would you want to get to that target audience?
 - c. what would you want the target audience to do/think differently as a result of seeing your public service announcement?

Possible In-class or Homework Assignment:

The Office of Substance Abuse funded the Think Again media campaign and would love to hear feedback from Maine's young people about its effectiveness. Write a brief letter letting them know what you think about it. All letters should be sent to:

Linda Williams
Prevention Team Manager
Office of Substance Abuse
159 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

If You Think Underage Drinking Isn't a Big Deal, Think Again!

Why is underage drinking a problem?

- ? While the good news is that most kids don't drink, we still have a serious problem, both here in Maine and around the nation. Alcohol is the drug of choice among Maine youth – more kids use alcohol than tobacco, marijuana, or any other illegal drugs.
- ? While they are in the minority, those kids who do drink are putting themselves at great risk. Alcohol can have powerful effects on anyone who uses it, but its use by children and teenagers poses even higher risks for minds and bodies that are still developing. According to the 2002 Maine Youth Drug and Alcohol Use Survey, about 6% of students in grades 6-8 and 23% of students grades 9-12 in Maine said they had participated in “binge” drinking (5 or more drinks in a row, on at least one occasion in the two weeks prior to the survey).³
- ? National research clearly demonstrates the many ways in which underage drinking is related to both small and large tragedies.
 - o Alcohol use clouds judgment and reduces inhibitions, both of which are critical safeguards during a developmental stage when risk-taking behavior is common.
 - o Alcohol use interferes with the development of social skills, critical thinking, academic achievement, and the ability to remember what is learned in school.⁴
 - o Drinking is a factor in early and unprotected sexual activity among teenagers, sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancy, and sexual assault.⁵
 - o Alcohol use is also implicated in all of the leading causes of death for youth – car crashes, homicide, suicide, drownings and other injuries. In Maine, approximately one-third of fatal car crashes involving young drivers are alcohol-related.⁶
 - o Alcohol kills more than 6 times more young people than all other illicit drugs combined.⁷
- ? It does make a difference when we keep our kids alcohol-free. While 40% of kids who begin drinking by age 14 will develop alcohol abuse or dependence at some point in their lives, that proportion drops to below 10% for those who begin drinking after age 21. It's worth the wait.⁸

³ Maine Youth Drug and Alcohol Use Survey, Office of Substance Abuse, Department of Behavioral and Developmental Services, 2000.

⁴ Brown SA, Tapert SF, Granholm E, et al., 2000. Neurological functioning of adolescents: Effects of protracted alcohol use. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* 24(2): 164-171. Acheson, S.K., Stein, R.M., and Swartzwelder, H.S. (1998). Impairment of Semantic and Figural Memory by Acute Ethanol: Age-dependent Effects. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 22, 1437-1442

⁵ Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free, 2001. *Keep Kids Alcohol Free: Strategies for Action*. NIH Publication No. 01-4780. Relationship between alcohol consumption and victim behaviors immediately preceding sexual aggression by an acquaintance. Nicole Turillon Harrington and Harold Leitenberg. *Violence and Victims* 9(4):315-324. 1994. Beliefs about the effects of alcohol on involvement in coercive and consenting sexual activities. Kim Fromme and Julie Wendel. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 25(23):2099-2117. 1995.

⁶ Maine Department of Public Safety, Bureau of Highway Safety; <http://www.state.me.us/dps/Bhs/youngdrivers1996.htm>

⁷ Miller T. and The Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. *Adolescent Deaths Attributable to Underage Drinking and to Illicit Drug Use*.

⁸ Grant BE, Dawson DA, 1997. Age at onset of alcohol use and association with DSM-IV alcohol abuse and dependence: Results from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Epidemiologic Survey. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9:103-110.

If You Think You're the Only Parent Concerned About Underage Drinking, Think Again!

A 1998 public opinion poll by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that 96% of the American public is concerned about teen alcohol use.⁹ Parents are a critical component of the solution, and parents are right to be concerned. However, we must help parents overcome a sense that teen drinking is inevitable – too often we hear, “my hands are tied.”

Just as youth often mistakenly perceive that their peers are drinking more than they really are, parents often mistakenly perceive that there is nothing they can do about the problem of underage drinking. So for parents who are asking “what can we do?” here are a few ideas:

- ✍ Send an unequivocal message that you expect your son or daughter not to use alcohol – set clear rules and enforce them consistently.
- ✍ Anticipate the various pressures that they might face regarding alcohol use, and help them think through ways to resist those pressures in advance.
- ✍ Establish a network of open communication with other parents so that you can work together to send consistent messages about the unacceptability of underage drinking in your community.
- ✍ Support the efforts of your schools and law enforcement agencies to enforce policies and laws consistently, fairly, and effectively.
- ✍ Hold your local merchants accountable for responsible alcohol sales and marketing practices.
- ✍ Be a positive role model – don't supply alcohol to minors, don't drink and drive, and if you choose to drink, do so in low-risk ways.
- ✍ Be a “hands-on” parent. The annual National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse, a survey of 1,000 teens (age 12-17), reveals that “hands-on” parents raise children who are less at risk of smoking, drinking, and using drugs.¹⁰ “Hands-on” parenting includes, among other things, establishing a household culture of rules and expectations for their teen's behavior and monitoring what their teens do such as the TV shows they watch, what they access on the Internet and the music CDs they buy, and where they are on evenings and weekends. Contrary to popular belief, teens in “hands-on” households are more likely to have an excellent relationship with their parents than teens with “hands-off” parents.
- ✍ Finally, encourage your kids to “Think Again.” Help them understand the true norms and correct their misperceptions so that they can see that everybody else isn't doing it and that by not drinking, they are already in the majority.

⁹ Wagenaar AC, Harwood E, Zander K., 1998. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Youth Access to Alcohol Survey: Summary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Alcohol Epidemiology Program.

¹⁰ National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse VI: Teens, 2001. National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. Available for download at <http://www.casacolumbia.org>.

Resources for more information on underage drinking and alcohol issues:

(note: this is not intended to be a complete listing,,simply a useful starting point. Inclusion here should not be construed or interpreted as an endorsement.)

Maine Office of Substance Abuse, Information and Resource Center
1-800-499-0027 (TTY: 1-800-215-7604)
<http://www.state.me.us/bds/osa/>

Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, Georgetown University
<http://camy.org/>

Center for Science in the Public Interest, [Alcohol Policies Project](#)
<http://www.cspinet.org/booze/index.html>

FACE, Truth and Clarity about Alcohol
http://faceproject.org/website/new_web/index_5.html

Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention
<http://www.edc.org/hec/>

Join Together, a resource to help communities working to stop substance abuse and gun violence
<http://www.jointogether.org/>

Mothers Against Drunk Driving
<http://www.madd.org/madd/home/>

National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University
<http://www.casacolumbia.org/>

National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration, Impaired Driving Division
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/alcohol/>

Northeast Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies
<http://www.edc.org/capt>

Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, Center for Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws
<http://www.udetc.org/>

SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, *a service of the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#), U.S. [Department of Health and Human Services](#)*
<http://www.health.org/>

Trauma Foundation, Alcohol Related Injuries and Violence Project
<http://www.tf.org/tf/alcohol/ariv/index.html>

University of Minnesota, Alcohol Epidemiology Program
<http://www.epi.umn.edu/alcohol/policy/default.html>

Roundtables (a.k.a. Study Circles)*

Roundtables are: A democratic discussion led by neutral facilitators focused on a specific and interesting topic

Roundtables are not:

- A debate
- A focus group
- A brainstorming session
- A method of action planning
- A class discussion led by a teacher

The facilitators' role is:

- ✍ To establish a safe and comfortable atmosphere
- ✍ To enforce the ground rules if the members of the group do not do so
- ✍ To ask questions to guide the discussion, and probe deeper when appropriate
- ✍ To be sure that everyone has opportunities to speak and nobody dominates
- ✍ To encourage the group members to interact with each other not just answer the facilitator's questions
- ✍ To raise questions that draw out additional points of view that may not be represented in the discussion
- ✍ To summarize key points when appropriate
- ✍ To record highlights if desired and ask participants to fill out evaluations

The facilitators' role is not:

- ✍ To present his/her opinion
- ✍ To judge the opinion of others
- ✍ To dominate the discussion with constant questions
- ✍ To establish the right answer
- ✍ To come up with a plan of action

Roundtables often:

- ✍ Follow a format that includes:
 1. Welcome/introductions/icebreaker
 2. Setting ground rules & explanation of facilitators' role
 3. Discussion starter (i.e. brief reading/video, scenario, opening question, etc)
 4. Discussion of different viewpoints/opinions and follow-up questions
 5. Summary and next steps if appropriate
- ✍ Include silence
- ✍ Meet more than once
- ✍ Have two facilitators
- ✍ Empower youth through facilitation skills/opportunities and an equal discussion

The purpose of a roundtable is:

- ✍ To build relationships among participants
- ✍ To share diverse points of view on an important topic
- ✍ To learn how others feel/think and understand why they think/feel that way
- ✍ To come to a better understanding as a group about a problem or issue
- ✍ To discuss important issues in a calm and safe atmosphere without the goal of convincing others to change their opinion
- ✍ Potentially (but not necessarily) to come up with a solution or action based on the discussion

* *Note: This information is based on the work of the Study Circle Resource Center and Nancy Ansheles. For more information on study circles, visit www.studycircles.org.*